

Durham rocker McPhatter joins Elvis in legends stamp collection

By Jay R. Davis
Staff Writer

For local rock fans who flipped when the U.S. Postal Service released the Elvis stamp in January, there's more where that came from, with an added treat for Triangle residents.

"The Legends of Rock 'n' Roll Collection" was released to post offices across the country Wednesday. Durham native Clyde McPhatter, founder of the rock band the Drifters, is among the collection's featured performers, along with Bill Haley, Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, Dinah Washington, Otis Redding and Elvis Presley.

"As far as I can recall, this is the first time a North Carolina native has been honored with a stamp," said Cleve Robertson, the supervisor of customer

services for the Durham Post Office. Susie Kirby, a secretary for the post office at Estes Drive, said few, if any, curiosity seekers had called about the new series. "It's nothing like it was for Elvis," she said.

The Jan. 8 release of an Elvis Presley stamp, the first in the "Legends" series, created a buying frenzy. Thousands of fans waited in line for hours, to get their own miniature version of the king of rock 'n' roll.

Barry Warren, who works for the Durham Post Office, said the post office there had received several inquiries but fewer than for the Elvis stamp.

"I think it's because these stamps have not been as publicized as the Elvis stamp," Warren said. "We've had calls from people who are generally interested in the collection."

McPhatter, lead singer for the Dominoes and founder of the Drifters, was born in Durham in 1932 but moved with his family to Teaneck, N.J., when he was only 12.

Although McPhatter left the area almost 50 years ago, some residents said that they were excited about the release of a postage stamp in his honor.

William McPhatter of Durham said he believed he was a distant relative of Clyde McPhatter. He said he didn't know he was related to the singer until he bought an oldies compact disc that featured a song by Clyde McPhatter.

"I just found out that we're related," William McPhatter said about his ties to the singer. "I asked my mom and she said we were (kin)."

McPhatter said he was interested in the stamp collection.

"It's nice. It's all right," William McPhatter said, adding that he probably would buy the stamp.

Robertson said he wanted the post office to host a ceremony honoring McPhatter, but he couldn't find enough information on the singer's stay in Durham to warrant it.

"I wanted to do something," Robertson said. "But it was such a long time ago apparently none of the family are still living in town."

Clyde McPhatter started singing in his dad's church as a young boy. At 17, he became the lead tenor of one of the most popular rhythm and blues groups, Billy Ward and the Dominoes.

In 1953, McPhatter left the Dominoes and started the Drifters, considered by some to be one of the best groups of the early rock era with hits

such as "Save the Last Dance for Me," "Under the Boardwalk" and "On Broadway." McPhatter was drafted in 1954 and never returned to the Drifters.

By 1956, McPhatter began to release a series of Billboard magazine pop hits. The release of "Treasure of Love," a top 20 hit, began a string of eight straight top 40 singles in less than six years. "Lover's Question," released in 1956, was No. 6 on Billboard's pop charts and No. 1 on the R&B charts.

McPhatter died in 1972 of an apparent heart attack in Manhattan, N.Y. He was a 1987 inductee into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame.

To help sell its rock legends stamps, the U.S. Postal Service has commissioned the Warner Music Group Inc. to issue a mail-order box set of 20 recordings by the musicians. McPhatter's hits,

"Money Honey," "Treasure of Love" and "Lover Please" are included, along with hits from the seven other artists.

The package includes "The Legends of Rock 'n' Roll/Rhythm & Blues" commemorative stamp booklet and a book featuring photos and other information on each artist.

U.S. Postmaster General Marvin Runyon said the rock series was a tribute to the musicians who helped to create the music.

"The legendary musicians we are honoring blended the rhythms and the sounds from several different cultures to create a new music form which was uniquely American," he said. "Their music caught the imagination of people throughout the world and influenced the works of other musicians for several generations."

PHE

Harvey says he should not have to apply as an adult-use business and thus adhere to more stringent building regulations because PHE is not a walk-in business, like the other examples cited in the ordinance.

The town will not oppose the appeal, and Harvey said he expected a decision in his favor next month.

OCAP has said it will seek permission from a county judge to fight the suit and now will be joined in its fight by the nationally known American Family Association, a Mississippi-based group led by the Rev. Donald Wildmon. Until OCAP hears from the judge, AFA will provide the group with legal advice.

Harvey said he was surprised the relocation has stirred so much controversy, especially since it involved only a move of about 10 miles.

"We're a mail-order operation," Harvey said. "It hardly matters whether we're here or there."

The fight for space in Hillsborough seems minor compared to the legal battles PHE has faced to protect its First Amendment right to adhere to its erotophilosophy.

Studies have shown that erotica is generally harmless and can often open communication between couples, Harvey said.

A board of seven or eight experts in human sexuality — mostly psychologists — review the tapes, books and sex materials sold in the Adam & Eve catalogs to make sure they appeal to a healthy

interest in sex.

"These people can say with genuine expertise that this is not harmful," Harvey said. At least two different reviewers check each product for signs of incest, underage performers, coercive sex or sadomasochism.

PHE handles \$65 million worth of sales a year. About 270 employees serve 1.5 million regular customers, who order by mail or by calling a toll-free number.

One of the hottest-selling products, Harvey said, is a \$39.95 video. "Night Trips," according to an Adam & Eve catalog, is about a woman with an over-sexed imagination who shares her erotic fantasies with a doctor and nurse through a television screen.

Employees in the cramped Carrboro offices take orders by mail and by phone.

Harvey said a customer's order is processed within three days. In the back of the brick building is the warehouse, where 12,000 orders are shipped out every day.

Moving to a larger plant in Hillsborough would improve efficiency and safety, Harvey said.

"We can't necessarily process more orders, but we could function as a company more efficiently if we weren't so crowded," he said. "And we wouldn't have to stack the boxes so high."

The products, which Harvey said he buys from distributors around the world, are not manufactured in Carrboro, the site of the only PHE plant.

To attract new customers, PHE places ads in publications such as Playboy, Penthouse, and even The New York Times, USA Today, Redbook, Gentleman's Quarterly and Psychology Today.

It also mails between 8 and 10 million "positive option" postcards each year to prospective customers. Roughly 10 percent of these cards are returned by people who request a catalog and a coupon promising a 50-percent discount.

The typical customers, Harvey said, are suburban, middle class, married couples in their 30s or 40s who have one or two children.

The company takes extra precautions to keep minors from getting their hands on the erotica, Harvey said. First, PHE accepts only checks, credit cards or bank money orders, which few minors can access. When customers order by phone, they are asked their age and date of birth.

"If they don't remember what year they were born, that's a giveaway," Harvey said.

Customers also must sign a certification on the order form saying they are 18 years or older, or 21 or older in some states. And the company sells videocassette locking devices at low costs.

But it hasn't been easy for Harvey's company to make the transition from selling condoms to erotica. In 1986,

Edwin Meese III, who then was the U.S. attorney general, created the National Obscenity Enforcement Unit, now called The Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section.

Harvey said that the Department of Justice's strategy was to attack sexual materials distributors with more than one obscenity charge in multiple jurisdictions, so that their funds would be sapped by legal fees, thus forcing them to shut down. Harvey said he could be sued in any state where Adam & Eve catalogs were distributed, not just in North Carolina, where the company is headquartered.

On May 29, 1986, officials from the North Carolina's State Bureau of Investigation, the Orange County Sheriff's Department, the Alamance County Vice Unit and postal inspectors from North Carolina, Utah, Arizona and California raided the PHE plant. In August, an obscenity trial was held in Alamance County and the company was cleared of all charges after the jury deliberated for only five minutes.

But in 1990, the U.S. government charged PHE with obscenity violations in Utah. Harvey responded by suing the government for trying to bully PHE into giving up its First Amendment right to sell erotica.

Two and a half years ago, a judge in the 10th U.S. Court of Appeals ruled in Harvey's favor in his civil suit against the government, agreeing that multiple prosecutions were an infringement of his First Amendment rights, he said.

But the judge then sent the case back to a district court in Salt Lake City, Utah, and a judge will decide if the government acted in bad faith in charging the company with violating obscenity laws in Utah.

"Ninety-eight percent of all this attention has been from a very small group of people," Harvey said, referring to officials in the justice department.

"This, to them, is more important than murder and mayhem. It just doesn't make sense that the justice department should be obsessed with what American adults can watch and read in their own homes."

But he added that he was optimistic that President Bill Clinton's justice department under Attorney General Janet Reno would not hunt distributors of erotica as intensely.

"This unit in the justice department won't be disbanded, but they won't be permitted to operate with such high zeal," he said.

Harvey

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for ways of promoting birth control and contraception through non-clinical means," Harvey said.

The idea was that contraceptives could be more efficiently and inexpensively distributed through the commercial sector than through public health facilities, especially in underdeveloped countries.

He began his field work in the United States, advertising mail-order condoms in campus newspapers, including The Daily Tar Heel.

"It was illegal at the time," Harvey said. "Information about birth control was obscene and unavailable."

"My professors were antsy. We were taking a legal risk. But it fitted in with our objective and resulted in a tremendous response."

Harvey said he never was confronted with legal problems and decided to divide his program into two branches: one became Population Services International, a non-profit organization that uses the commercial sector to provide affordable contraception; the other branch became PHE Inc.

Harvey was president of PSI from 1970 to 1977, and he remains an active consultant. He now is the president of DKT International, a smaller company created to complement PSI.

According to a newsletter released by DKT International, the organization operates contraceptive-marketing programs in Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Malaysia and the Philippines.

With funding from subscription and advertising revenues from two DKT International publications, Sex Over 40 and Family Planning World, the organization can offer subsidized contraceptives, Harvey said.

Brazilians, for example, can buy DKT International condoms at a price equivalent to 16 U.S. cents, when other commercially available condoms cost 70 cents to a dollar. Funding also comes from agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Another goal is AIDS awareness and protection. "Wise Guy," a cartoon character sporting sunglasses and a condom cap on its head, promotes AIDS education messages in Malaysia.

Back in the United States, PHE began from offices in Chapel Hill and was incorporated in 1972. After moving to several different buildings in Chapel Hill, the company settled in the Carrboro plant 12 or 13 years ago.

Harvey said PHE had tried to expand from condoms into other mail-order areas, but when Adam & Eve offered digital alarm clocks, leisure wear or jewelry and other accessories, customers simply didn't respond.

But the condoms remained popular. "Anything with an erotic appeal would sell very well," he said. "The catalog was built on the basis of customer preference."

"We began by offering books about human reproduction. There was a real interest in visual products with erotic appeal. We decided there wasn't anything wrong with that."

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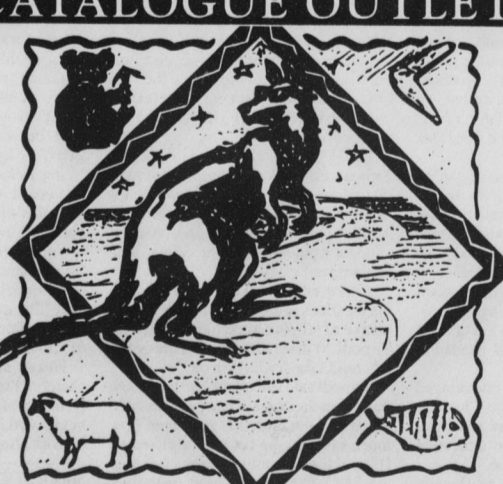
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improvements.

"We're going to do whatever we can," Hakan said. "I don't care where the ideas come from. If they work, they work."

"Nobody can do this by themselves — the town certainly can't, the downtown can't, restaurants can't," he said. "We're willing to do all we can."

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